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NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education

EXPANDED STRONGSTART BC HELPS EARLY LEARNERS

VICTORIA – The Province is expanding the StrongStart BC early learning program by adding centres throughout B.C. to help preschool-age children get ready for kindergarten, Education Minister Shirley Bond announced today.

"We know that nearly one out of four kindergarten students is not developmentally ready to start school," Bond said. "These early learning centres are part of our plan to improve pre-literacy skills so that B.C. children have the best possible start in school and in life."

All of B.C.'s 60 school districts have been offered the opportunity to participate in the program and almost all districts plan to open one or more StrongStart BC centres to benefit families in their community. The Province is providing a total of $5 million for up to 80 StrongStart BC centres as part ReadNow BC, the new provincial literacy plan.

StrongStart BC centres use underutilized school space to offer a free drop-in program for parents or caregivers and their children. Qualified early childhood educators lead learning activities, including stories, music and art to help children grow linguistically, physically and socially, and become comfortable in a school-like environment.

"This initiative gives preschool-age children the opportunity to meet and make connections with other children attending the centre," said Tom Christensen, Minister of Children and Family Development. "It builds on our commitment to ensure all B.C.'s children develop language and other skills for success in school."

StrongStart BC centres fulfil an election platform and throne speech commitment to use underutilized school spaces as centres to deliver early learning services. Like the School Community Connections program that provides community access to underutilized school space, StrongStart BC centres turn the challenge of declining enrolment into an opportunity. Since 2001, enrolment in B.C. schools has decreased by more than 50,000 students.

"Families and caregivers who attend these centres will be supported and encouraged to interact with their children to support early learning," said Linda Reid, Minister of State for Childcare. "They will also learn how to support their children's learning through play and pre-literacy activities at home."

The StrongStart BC centre program complements recently introduced legislation to expand the role of school boards to include early learning and community literacy.

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"School boards around B.C. are pleased to add StrongStart BC centres to their various efforts in early learning," said B.C. School Trustees Association president Penny Tees. "We recognize this is a key area and trustees are ready for the challenge an expanded mandate will bring."

The Province is committed to reaching its goal of making B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent. StrongStart BC centres are a part of government's overall plan to prepare students for success in school and improve literacy, and will build on Ready, Set, Learn, a kindergarten readiness program.

Over the last three years, the Province has provided $9 million to operate Ready, Set, Learn. Last year, the program was offered in 1,071 schools and served more than 17,000 preschoolers. StrongStart centres also complement the $2.7-million ActNow Literacy Education Activity and Play (LEAP BC) initiative that encourages literacy, physical activity and healthy eating in preschool-aged children.

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1 factsheet(s) attached.

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FACTSHEET

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STRONGSTART BC EXPANSION TO BENEFIT B.C. COMMUNITIES

Strong Start BC centres must be located in schools with unused and underutilized space. TBD indicates school districts have yet to determine the exact location of their StrongStart BC centre.

No.	School District	School(s)
5	Southeast Kootenay	Amy Woodland elementary Steeples elementary
6	Rocky Mountain	Alexander Park elementary
8	Kootenay Lakes	Creston Education Centre
10	Arrow Lakes	Nakusp elementary
19	Revelstoke	Mountain View elementary
20	Kootenay-Columbia	Fruitvale elementary
22	Vernon	Harwood elementary
23	Central Okanagan	A.S. Matheson elementary
27	Cariboo-Chilcotin	100 Mile House elementary Marie Sharpe elementary
28	Quesnel	Riverview elementary
33	Chilliwack	Little Mountain elementary Watson elementary
34	Abbotsford	Alexander elementary Clearbrook elementary
35	Langley	Nicomekl elementary Shortreed Community
36	Surrey	Bridgeview elementary Cougar Creek elementary
37	Delta	Hellings elementary McCloskey elementary
38	Richmond	Mitchell elementary
39	Vancouver	TBD TBD
40	New Westminster	Queen Elizabeth elementary
41	Burnaby	Edmonds Community Forest Grove elementary Morley elementary
42	Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows	Eric Langton elementary
43	Coquitlam	Riverview Park elementary Roy Stibbs elementary
44	North Vancouver	Westview elementary
45	West Vancouver	Hollyburn elementary

No.	School District	School(s)
46	Sunshine Coast	Sechelt elementary
47	Powell River	James Thomson elementary Henderson elementary
48	Howe Sound	Squamish elementary
49	Central Coast	Bella Coola elementary
50	Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte	Tahayghen elementary
51	Boundary	John A. Hutton elementary
52	Prince Rupert	Conrad elementary TBD
53	Okanagan Similkameen	Okanagan Falls elementary Oliver elementary
54	Bulkley Valley	Muheim Memorial elementary
57	Prince George	Carney Hill elementary Spruceland elementary
58	Nicola-Similkameen	Diamond Vale elementary John Allison elementary
59	Peace River South	Parkhill elementary Tremblay elementary
60	Peace River North	Duncan Cran elementary
61	Greater Victoria	George Jay elementary Tillicum Community
62	Sooke	Ruth King elementary
63	Saanich	Sidney elementary
64	Gulf Islands	Salt Spring elementary
67	Okanagan Skaha	Queens Park elementary
68	Nanaimo-Ladysmith	Fairview Community Georgia Avenue elementary
69	Qualicum	TBD
70	Alberni	Ucluelet elementary
71	Comox Valley	Glacier View elementary Ecole Puntledge Park elementary
72	Campbell River	Cedar elementary Georgia Park elementary
73	Kamloops/Thompson	John Tod elementary
74	Gold Trail	Cayoosh elementary
75	Mission	West Heights elementary
78	Fraser-Cascade	Coquihalla elementary Boston Bar elementary
79	Cowichan Valley	Koksilah elementary Alexander elementary
81	Fort Nelson	G.W. Carlson elementary
82	Coast Mountains	ET Kenney Primary
83	North Okanagan-Shuswap	M.V. Beattie elementary Parkview elementary
84	Vancouver Island West	TBD
85	Vancouver Island North	Cheslakees elementary Robert Scott elementary

No.	School District	School(s)
87	Stikine	Atlin elementary
91	Nechako Lakes	Mouse Mountain elementary Muriel Mould Primary
93	Conseil scolaire francophone	TBD

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